

DATE: October 2, 2020

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SUBJECT: Friday Update

All,

A recap of the City Council Meeting and some food for thought on the recent fires in the Napa Valley.

City Council Review:

Consent Calendar Items:

- Authorization to bid for concrete services for the repair and reconstruction of curb cuts and Accessibility ramps on sidewalks throughout the City.
- Approval of the Auburn Airport Capital Improvement Program for submittal to the FAA for funding of improvements totaling approximately \$2.4 million in the fiscal year.
- Acceptance and authorization to install emergency generators for the Police Department and City Hall for backup power related to rolling blackouts and PSPS Events.

The discussion items included:

- A review of the Auburn Police Advisory Council. The group will consist of between 10-15 members from throughout the Auburn community (residents and businesses) to advise and advance public projects related to local law enforcement efforts. The program will enable a cross section of the community to work collaboratively with the Chief and Police Staff to identify key issues and solutions. Here is a copy of the 2019 Annual Report: <https://www.auburn.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1706/2019-Annual-Report> Look for an upcoming announcement for applications on to the Council from the PD and City. A really important and innovative program to bring the community into the Department and participate in shaping important Auburn Police Department Programs.
- Acceptance of \$49,500 in grant funding for fire break clearance of 10 acres within the shaded fuel break area.
- The Fire Department has just released their Statistics and Executive Summary for the months of July and August: <https://www.auburn.ca.gov/466/Executive-Summary-Statistics> Really good stuff!

A discussion on wildfires.....

The presentation from Fire Chief Dave Spencer and the questions from the City Council brought forward the myriad of issues surrounding fire prevention. The complexity and difficulty of dealing with the imminent threats of wildfire, the Wildland Urban Interface (homes built within wildland and canyon areas), private and public property owner responsibilities and the immense costs associated with prevention all came forward. The reality is that the development of fuel breaks is expensive (\$5,000 per acre) and the immediate threats to residents throughout the City and Downtown and Old Town commercial areas is something which is amongst the most serious issues facing Auburn. The need for supportive infrastructure, roads, water lines, access points is considerable. The need for planning and implementation has never been more important. The \$49,500 grant is really just a drop in the bucket.

I will share that Chief Spencer and I spent the morning after the City Council meeting discussing overall strategy, a course on planning and the enormity of the task at hand. Ironically, during the meeting, both my and the Chief's cell phones were blowing up with information about the spread of the "Glass Fire" which has devastated the Napa Valley, engulfing the communities of St. Helena, Calistoga and the Silverado Trail.

The similarities of Auburn and the communities impacted by the Glass Fire are impressive. Both St. Helena and Calistoga are built within the oak lined canyons of the Napa Valley. Custom subdivisions and rural homes built within the Wildland Urban Interface, commercial areas and Highway 29 tucked along the oak lined roadways. As much as Auburn is the "mecca" for trail running and mountain bikes, the hillsides and trails in the hills through these Napa Valley communities are similar if not identical to our town. The lands surrounding Napa, St. Helena and Calistoga are a combination of "rural and private" properties owned by ranchland families, farmers, public land trusts, State Parks, agencies like the Bureau of Reclamation. As the Chief and I talked, it was a reality check that these communities are potentially Auburn!

In the past three years, the devastation of wildfire has become a year round and almost daily occurrence. Santa Rosa, Paradise, Napa, Winters, Vacaville, Redding, Malibu and 27 current wildfires throughout the State as of the writing of this note (Thursday, 6:30 pm). In 2020, total burned acreage is 3.7 million acres, 8,000 lost structures and 29 fatalities. Since 2018, the totals are almost 6 million acres burned, 32,000 structures and 200 fatalities.

Many know that I have recently moved to Auburn from Winters. In the past 7 years, we have dealt with 10 major wildfires, 6 involving massive CalFire response, hundreds of thousand of acres burned, the destruction of hundreds of homes and the deaths and severe injury to many. I served as the Director of Emergency Services in evacuating thousands from their homes. The saddest reality is that most of those who lost homes were not only immediately homeless, but most do not live in Winters any longer. The destruction of fire is not only property and lives, but the loss of important community members who may never return. Of the 10 wildfires, the first was the smallest (8,000 acres) and LNU Lightening Complex this year was close to 400,000 and the most destructive.



After our meeting on Tuesday, I asked the Chief “when does fire season start?”. He told me on October 1!

Look for a more robust discussion on fire prevention, property owner responsibilities and overall strategies for everything from evacuation procedures to infrastructure needs to come forward in coming community forums and City Council Meetings.

Thanks,

John

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